

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

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a *paterfamilias*, with a unique concentration of power in his hands. 596
 If his grown children did not submit to his control, then they could 178
 leave his house but had no means of removing him against his will.
 Death alone could do that.

Such was the family situation in Dragalevtsy with the coming 178
 of liberation after the Russo-Turkish War in 1878. The changes 642
 which have occurred in the family since then have been related in 596
 no small degree to the political fortunes of Bulgaria. The Bulgarian
 constitution was drawn up in Timovo in imitation of the constitutions
 of the West, and made Bulgaria a constitutional monarchy with a
 national parliament. Unfortunately, the new frame of government
 disregarded many traditional practices of the peasants and sought to
 impose upon them foreign ideas and strange governmental processes.

In April, 1879, Alexander of Battenberg, who was an officer 175
 in the Prussian army and the favorite nephew of Tsar Alexander II
 of Russia, was elected Prince over the country. In September, 1885,
 Bulgaria united with Eastern Rumelia, an area which had been placed
 back under nominal Turkish control by the Treaty of Berlin. Prince
 Alexander, because he did not collaborate sufficiently with the Russians
 in their desire to make Bulgaria completely subservient to Russia, was
 abducted from Sofia and forced to abdicate in 1886. Then the Bul-
 garian leaders shopped around Europe for another Prince, and finally
 in 1887 chose Prince Ferdinand of the Saxe-Coburg-Gotha line. He
 did much to make Bulgaria a stronger state, but he showed poor judg-
 ment in ordering Bulgarian troops to attack Serbia, thereby starting
 the Second Balkan War in which Bulgaria suffered catastrophic defeat
 at the hands of her former allies in the First Balkan War. In 1918,
 because he had been a party to the alliance of Bulgaria with the Cen-
 tral Powers in the First World War, he was forced to abdicate in
 favor of his son Boris.

From her inception as a state Bulgaria tried to make a success 642
 of representative government. Men were urged to vote; in fact, they 666
 were fined the equivalent of five dollars if they failed to vote. But in [687] ●
 spite of the dream of Young Bulgaria at Timovo, in spite of her

648 ternational affairs, conducted himself with such astuteness that he be-
 668 came almost a legendary figure in a short time. In fact, he enters
 this account in an authentic way because he visited Dragalevtsy quite
 unexpectedly, ate meat balls at the tavern with the peasants, and en-
 deared himself in particular by treating the crowd to two or three
 rounds of drinks. "Setting up the house" was a practice none too
 common in the frugal economy that characterized the village. Most
 of those present spoke quite freely, but two Russian soldiers, definitely
 ill-at-ease, remained stolidly silent. One old villager did throw caution
 to the winds and sidled up to tell the distinguished guest, "We are
 not satisfied, Mr. Ethridge. Don't believe all of the things these
 young fellows have been telling you." Mr. Ethridge, upon leaving
 the tavern, was surprised to see Renaissance Square filled with en-
 thusiastic villagers, who cheered him and presented him with many
 bouquets of flowers.

[666] Later the Secretary of State's special emissary wrote a critical re-
 port on the existing Bulgarian government and pointed out what he
 judged to be its undemocratic features. The American representatives
 were unable, however, to persuade the Bulgarian authorities to post-
 pone the elections for a second time, so the voting went off as sched-
 uled on November 18, 1945, with the opposition groups abstaining from
 the balloting.

• [687] In spite of these political developments, the peasants in the
 Agrarian party (the majority in Dragalevtsy) continued to regard
 Mr. Barnes and Mr. Ethridge in a favorable light. They like to tell
 stories of the way these Americans supposedly outwitted the Bulgarian
 authorities. One of these stories, with no foundation in fact, shows
 how rumors rise in the Balkans. Mr. Ethridge and his small party
 were said to have visited a concentration camp for political prisoners
 near Dupnitsa. Since they were planning to visit the historic and
 beautifully situated Rila Monastery, they obtained permission to stop
 off en route at this particular camp. According to the peasants' ver-
 sion, when the party arrived they found comparatively few people in
 the camp; the place was clean, and the prisoners seemed well cared
 for. That was that; farewells were said and the party moved on to
 the Monastery. Late in the afternoon, instead of going to the provin-

cial town of Somokov as originally scheduled, Mr. Ethridge asked his driver when they reached a crossroad to take the fork of the road which circled back past Dupnitsa. Once more at the camp, he asked to be admitted and saw for himself the conditions of overcrowding all too evident when the prisoners who had been sent to the woods for the day were back in their quarters. Without wasting any words Mr. Ethridge merely smiled to the attendants, got back into the automobile, and returned to Sofia.

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But stories of camps for political prisoners took my mind back to the 1930's when the government then in power was fearful of Communism and conducted frequent raids upon Communist-operated printing presses. Much doctrinaire literature was seized and the offenders were given heavy prison sentences. A member of an opposition group has never felt very safe in the Balkans. The Zveno group, which has already been mentioned, came into power in 1934 and which still was co-operating with the Fatherland Front, worked out a new wrinkle in the treatment of political prisoners. On March 19, 1935, I wrote in a letter to America:

Just a little sidelight on political life in Bulgaria. Students who make radical speeches or editors who print little articles opposed to the *status quo* are forcefully invited to leave Sofia for a rest-cure in one of the provincial towns of Bulgaria. They go, for instance, to Karlovo and are "put up" by the government. They are perfectly free with the exception that they must stay in Karlovo, must report to an official at eight each morning, at noon, and must be in their room by eight in the evening, and cannot venture forth until eight the next morning. Such an "invitation" usually holds good for one month, after which the chastened individuals are permitted to return to Sofia, the political cauldron of Bulgaria.

More and more, Balkan governments must be judged not only in terms of the four freedoms which we publicize in America but also in terms of the governments which have preceded them. That is, they must be interpreted, although not justified, in the light of the cultural setting out of which they have sprung.

There was another apocryphal Ethridge story, which illustrated the use of humor as a weapon of the opposition groups to make their life more endurable. The scene was laid around Kyustendil, the chief

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fruit-growing area of the country. Mr. Ethridge, in his search for the truth, reputedly approached some of the local inhabitants:

"How are you getting along? Are you satisfied with conditions as they are?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Ethridge. We are quite satisfied, for this is just like Paradise [the Garden of Eden]."

The visitor was jolted a bit to hear so much enthusiasm after the many tales of woe which had been poured out to him elsewhere. "What do you mean? In what way is this like Paradise?"

"Kyustendil is just like Paradise," came the reply, "because we have plenty of apples to eat but no clothes to wear."

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As time passed, the Communists became more determined to make their position secure. To accomplish this, Bulgarian-born Georgi Dimitrov came down from Russia, where he had once been Secretary of the Comintern, to take over active direction of party strategy. (This Georgi Dimitrov was quite a different person from the Agrarian leader, Georgi M. Dimitrov.) Occasionally peasants would joke about the high board fence around Communist Dimitrov's yard in Sofia, built to protect him from any would-be assassin. The elections of November 18, 1945, revealed to the leaders of the National Front their relatively weak position. Great numbers of people had abstained from voting, a fact commonly interpreted as a vote for the opposition. Few foreign observers in Sofia actually believed the highly favorable figures which the government claimed in the announced election returns. In the Dragalevtsy district, for instance, thirteen hundred people had been eligible to vote. This number included for the first time all women and all young people 19 years of age and over. It also included the industrialized area, called the Mahala, which lies just below the village on the Sofia road. Approximately 800 votes were cast, of which 200 were against and 600 for the government, or Fatherland Front. Well informed people connected with the Ministry of Interior said that most of the five hundred abstainers had been peasants and that most of the votes cast for the government had come from the industrialized Mahala, which was known as a Communist center. In other words, as one villager succinctly expressed it, "Our people in Dragalevtsy are not for the present government."

COMMUNISM AT THE DOOR

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representing the majority of the young people, had an increasing voice in village affairs and were aggressive in their approach to practical problems. Part of this aggressiveness was directed against the young people at that time still active in the ZMS (Agrarian Youth Society), which was a part of the opposition. 668 595 883 178

Another means by which the Communists gained support was in the favoritism shown to party members in the distribution of rationed articles. Just as the ward boss of an American city or the prewar mayor of Dragalevtsy learned that gratitude prompts support or that favors, done call for favors in return, so the Fatherland Front made good use of its opportunities. Some of its generosity served purely political ends. The mayor of Sofia, so the Dragalevtsy peasants said, gave one million leva at Christmas time to the *Septemvriches*, or National Children's Communist Organization. Opposition groups, of course, received no such largesse. 668 661

But many of the criticisms of pork-barrel politics were due to misunderstanding. The peasants of Dragalevtsy could usually procure no clothing coupons if they had wool at home, and most of them did have a small supply which they were allowed to keep. This amount was based on family size and any surplus was requisitioned by the government. Artisans and laborers, however, who had no sheep, who worked in factories or at their trade, received the clothing coupons, for that was the only way they had of obtaining wearing apparel. Wool and cotton, thread, and goods were still so scarce in both villages and cities that no one group was content with what it had, and peasants were inclined to ascribe whatever others received as due to favoritism rather than the merits of the case. The proof that wool was scarce was the relative inactivity of the carding and spinning *sedenki*, the working bees so popular among the women.

"Why don't you have *sedenki* now," I asked.

"We have no wool to work," was the plausible answer.

Communist party members who used their political standing for self-aggrandizement and enrichment were supposed to be severely dealt with by the party authorities. One story making the rounds in Dragalevtsy had done much to discredit the Communists with those in the opposition. Since living in a Balkan village is a great deal like 668 661 687

668 living in a goldfish bowl, it was not long before the peasants knew
661 that almost a million leva (notice how rounded or approximate the
687 numbers are in such stories) had disappeared from local public funds.
There was no official explanation as to its whereabouts, but one Communist had become quite rich and built himself a house better than the village expected of him. Later he was expelled from the party, reputedly because of conversion of funds, but even this action did not restore the funds to the public treasury.

Unquestionably, a loyal supporter of the Fatherland Front was able at times to use his political connections for personal advantage. The peasants would have been surprised if this were not the case, for they philosophically said, "Whoever sticks his fingers in honey is apt to lick them."

207 Mention was made in the last chapter of the phenomenal increase
668 in radio ownership since 1937. Now about every third home has a receiving set and is thus in contact with the propaganda line of the government-controlled broadcasting service. Listening to the radio had become a new recreational pattern for many people. Over and over again I asked them what programs they preferred. The men, perhaps because they deemed it the proper answer, often said that they listened to the news. Quite a few were quick to add, "It's nothing but lies though." Many of the women preferred the folk music, and the young people jazz. Long speeches claimed few listeners. The net effect of radio listening then was recreational, with some political influence exerted upon the devotees of the newscast. As yet, the radio had not become a channel for education or raising the standard of living. I wondered, too, just when it would, for the peasants had little hesitation in turning off the set if the program became too serious, and most educational programs under Communist leadership were inclined to be serious.

204 American and British influence was sufficiently strong to force
668 the Fatherland Front officials to allow an opposition press. Although this press was beset with difficulties in 1945, it nevertheless became a vehement, at times vitriolic, critic of the regime in power. It took a strong pro-American, pro-British complexion, though never out-and-out anti-Russian. A good check on Agrarian claims of majority sup-

659 nals, one of them the organ of the Communist-dominated
793 Synod, made propaganda at the government's behest. Every-
626 one who gave any indication of fidelity to the Christian creed
in its true significance and glory had to reckon with the possi-
bility that he would speedily be sentenced to one of the dreaded
prisons—Kolarovgrad, for example—which were always
crammed with the unfortunate victims of tyranny.

659 The Orthodox Church having been transformed into an ab-
798 ject lackey of the State, Communist wrath descended on the
religious minorities. Protestants were the first victims. Mis-
sionaries had come to Bulgaria from Turkey, and had estab-
lished schools which, despite wars and upheavals, gave a good
education to boys and girls. An exemplary woman introduced
the kindergarten system and trained native teachers. By the
close of World War I, hostility to Protestants had pretty largely
died down; and although the small congregations did not grow
rapidly they successfully maintained their identities. Their
pride and joy was the American College, situated near Sofia.
It was closed by the Nazis in 1942 and has not been reopened.
The work of the Y.M.C.A. and the Y.W.C.A. was suppressed at
the same time, and the Communist regime has not lifted the
prohibition.

691 The legislation adopted during February, 1949 (often re-
● 687 ferred to as the Canonical Purity Laws) contained a number
648 of provisions designed to render impossible any religious ac-
tivity under the auspices of a Church or institution with head-
quarters outside Bulgaria. It stipulated, for example, that any
Church or any clergyman desiring "canonical relations with
or aid or gifts from" institutions, organizations, or official per-
sonages abroad must secure permission in advance from the
Ministry for Foreign Affairs. It was presumably under this
legislation that fifteen Protestant pastors were brought to trial
for high treason during 1949. It was the first large-scale action

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SOVIETIZING THE BALKAN REGION

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against Protestants in any satellite country, though to be sure Protestant Churches had suffered grievously in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland. The pastors, none of whom had occupied a position of eminence, were confronted with a lengthy list of charges. In particular they had, the Public Prosecutor contended, given military, economic, and political information to representatives of hostile foreign powers. They were also accused of having "spread malicious rumors about Russia." Those indicted—the Reverend Basil Ziapkov, for example—made confessions of the length desired and pleaded for mercy. The Court pronounced sentences of varying severity.

Manifestly this trial was also a blow struck at the prestige of the United States, from which most of the support for the Protestant congregations had come. Its primary effect was, no doubt, that the curtain was rung down on any hopes Bulgarian citizens might have that diplomatic intervention by the West would blunt the edge of the Soviet sickle, or that Washington could defend the interests of Americans in regions under Russian domination. How complete the resulting loss of morale was can be deduced from the official statements issued by the other Churches on the subject of the ordeal to which Protestantism had been subjected. The Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church declared, for example:

In accordance with our Church's traditional solicitude for fostering the aspirations of the people and maintaining loyalty to the State, the Holy Synod has always exhorted its clergy to look upon themselves as preachers of the Divine Word and as guardians of the Holy Spirit, and to remain aloof from all political influences hostile to the country and its people. We must add that the pastors of the Holy Orthodox Church have consistently obeyed our admonition. Not one of them has been prosecuted by the authorities on account of religious activities.

The Holy Synod strongly condemns all subversive activities carried

226 *RELIGION BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN*

755 on by the faithful, all actions detrimental to our People's Republic,
658 and anything which may threaten the independence and liberty of our
people. And we condemn such things even more strongly when they
are carried on by those who profess other creeds.

The statements made by the Catholic bishops, both of the Latin
and of the Greek rite, contained professions of loyalty to the
government but did not comment on the trial of their Protestant
brethren.

653 The Catholic Church wielded an influence in Bulgaria which
● 687 was wholly disproportionate to its size. Fewer than ten persons
793 in a thousand professed to belong to this Church, which of
course was also hampered by the division according to the two
rites. But Catholics had played a stirring part in the struggle
for liberation from Turkish rule, and so their heroes were
eminent in the nation's song and story. Educational institutions
created and developed by members of religious orders were
likewise held in high esteem, and many of the graduates were
prominent in the civil service and the professions. These insti-
tutions have been nationalized, and the Church itself is circum-
scribed by the laws affecting religion. During 1949, the Catho-
lic Bishops acceded to the government's request and sent a
message to the United Nations affirming the existence of re-
ligious freedom in Bulgaria. Subsequently the lot of both
clergy and laity grew steadily worse; but the first spectacular
and drastic action taken against the Church was the arrest of
a bishop, more than a score of priests, and a number of laymen,
on the usual charge of conspiring with a hostile foreign power.
The Bishop and three priests were sentenced to death for high
treason, and twenty-four priests and twelve laymen received
prison sentences. Therewith an almost mortal blow was struck
at the life and organized activity of the Church.*

000 * Most of the more than half a million Mohammedans in Bulgaria were of
Turkish descent. During 1950 the government began deporting them to Turkey,